Nine confirmed dead in Glasgow helicopter crash

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At least nine people are now confirmed dead and three remain in intensive care, following the crash of a Police Scotland helicopter into the Clutha Vaults pub close to the River Clyde in Glasgow, Scotland, last Friday. Of the 32 survivors who were taken to hospital, 3 are undergoing intensive care.

Three of the Eurocopter EC135 crew died in the incident, along with at least six people inside Clutha Vaults. The pub had been hosting a live music event with more than 100 people inside when the helicopter crashed into its roof.

According to some witnesses the helicopter "dropped like a stone." The owner of the pub told *Sky News* that the roof was not designed to bear any heavy weight, being constructed of timber beams, plywood and felt.

It emerged on Monday that the helicopter did not send out a Mayday rescue call and the pilot gave out no emergency transmissions. Neither did it have a cockpit voice recorder or flight data recorder (black box).

On Monday, David Miller, deputy chief inspector of air accidents, said the EC135 had computer systems on board and "it may be possible to recover recorded data from those systems."

Without apparent proof, Miller ruled out any connection between this crash and those affecting helicopters that have recently crashed in the North Sea. He stated, "There is no cause to connect this accident with any previous accidents to helicopters operating in the North Sea environment".

While the helicopter models are different, they are made by the same firm, Eurocopter. The latest crash in the North Sea in August saw four people killed when its Eurocopter AS332 Super Puma ditched into the sea near Sumburgh airport in the Shetland Islands. Variants of the AS332 Super Puma account for 50 percent of the North Sea industry fleet.

Since the crash, worried family members have awaited definitive news of the fate of their loved ones. Louise O'Prey, sister of Mark O'Prey, said, "We are pretty sure that he's gone but until I get that information we just don't know when that's going to be. I can't accept it until then."

O'Prey's father, Ian, speaking to BBC Radio Scotland, criticised the speed of the rescue effort, saying, "I thought if they'd made a better attempt on the Saturday night, I thought they perhaps could have got them out a lot earlier than they did but I think they were more concerned about this helicopter."

John McGarrigle, a local poet, is understood to be among those killed. McGarrigle, from the Castlemilk area of Glasgow, has written several volumes of poetry about the city and its working class. One of his compilations is called "Workers City, The Real Glasgow Stands Up."

His son, also John McGarrigle, said, "When I came round and seen where the position of the helicopter [was] that was when I knew, because he sat in that spot all the time, where the copter hit. I am still shaking."

John told *Sky News* of his anger that his father had still not been accounted for after several days. "I'm extremely angry my dad is lying in there. I was told last night that [the building] would not be getting touched [and that] no bodies were being taken out. At three in the morning, I saw a body being taken out on the news. I am enraged. I was supposed to get a phone call to tell me exactly what was happening. I've not had that phone call. What about the dignity for the human beings underneath that police helicopter? If they've got one out, they can get the rest out," he said.

Early Monday afternoon, the helicopter was winched from the roof of the pub and a full search of the premises was underway. The wreckage was taken to the

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Air Accidents Investigation Branch's Farnborough facility "for detailed examination."

The copter was operated by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) from private firm Bond Air Services. Following the crash, the SPA said it would continue to operate a helicopter supplied by the firm.

Whatever the findings of the investigation, safety issues have already arisen regarding the particular Eurocopter EC135 model. Last year, the European Aviation Safety Agency issued a directive requiring pre-flight inspections of the EC135 after cracks were detected in part of the main rotor hub shaft of one aircraft in France.

The agency told the *Financial Times*, "At this stage there is no reason that can lead us to make a link between that directive and what has happened in Glasgow."

However, the findings were serious enough for Bond to temporarily suspend, for 34 hours, all EC 135 flights in May 2012 after the cracks were detected. The helicopter involved in the crash underwent safety checks last July, as a precaution, but it was not withdrawn from service.

A May 8 statement from Bond, as it gave the go-ahead to resume EC 135 flights, said Eurocopter had subsequently "developed a deeper understanding of the strength and the stress levels present within the rotor hub." Air safety authorities including the European Aviation Safety Agency were also informed.

Bond reported that Eurocopter "has given an unequivocal guarantee that the EC 135 is safe to fly within normal operational limits following the continuing practice of visual inspections prior to each flight."

No explanation has been given as to why the police helicopter was in the sky above the Clutha. The landlord of the Clutha said the immediate area around the building is not a very well-lit spot, having just one streetlight in the vicinity.

Police helicopters flying above urban areas, and particularly densely populated housing estates, are a feature of life in the UK for the last decade, with every major force having its own. Many are leased from Bond, which has a fleet of more than 43 aircraft. These are also provided to air ambulance services, marine support and used at offshore wind farms and lighthouses. The firm notes these complete "106,000 flight hours across the globe" and the "group benefits from an international presence".

From April 2012, police aviation in the UK, which had previously operated on a geographical force-by-force organisation, became centralised as the National Police Air Service (NPAS). Twenty-five NPAS aircraft are placed at 23 strategic locations and are able to "provide an air service to 98 percent of the population of England and Wales within 20 minutes."

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